

more time for the cultivation of pleasant pursuits and attractive surroundings. But, as it had been in the earliest days, the home remained at the centre of Canadian life. People not only lived in their homes, they often worked at home and enjoyed their leisure hours there as well.



Women's Wentworth Historical Society

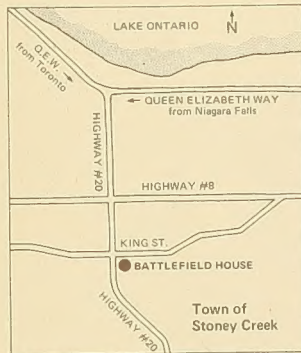
When Battlefield House went up for sale in 1899, Mrs. John Calder (a granddaughter of James Gage) rescued it from an uncertain fate. With a group of patriotic and enterprising women, she formed The Women's Wentworth Historical Society and raised the money to purchase the old Gage home and the land around it on which the Battle of Stoney Creek was fought. The Society maintained the historic site for sixty-three years, securing a part of Canadian heritage that would surely have been lost without its efforts.

In 1962, the Women's Wentworth Historical Society turned Battlefield House over to The Niagara Parks Commission. The Commission has restored it to the 1830-40 period and opened a museum room containing many objects of interest from the Battle of Stoney Creek and the War of 1812. Continuing its interest in the historic site, the Women's Wentworth Historical Society has furnished Battlefield House as it might have been when it was the home of the Gage family.

A glimpse into the past

"The home" was at the centre of early Canadian life. Carefully restored, Battlefield House offers many interesting and exciting opportunities to discover what life was once like in the Niagara Peninsula. Come and visit, won't you?

Map of the Town of Stoney Creek



Other historic locations within The Niagara Parks System include Old Fort Erie, McFarland House, Oak Hall Estate Mansion, Willoughby Historical Museum and Mackenzie House (Queenston).

For information on these and other attractions and facilities, write to:



The Niagara Parks Commission
Box 150
Niagara Falls, Ontario
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Publications

Stoney Creek Battlefield House and the War of 1812-14



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Pioneer life in the Niagara Peninsula

Mary Gage and her two children, James and Elizabeth, came to Stoney Creek from New York State some years after the American Revolution. They were among the earliest settlers in the Niagara Peninsula and their first years of pioneering involved rough, back-breaking work. Gradually, they cleared a space in the huge forest and put their land under cultivation. They also acquired some livestock and put up a barn and fences.



Like most pioneer families, their first dwelling was made of logs and squared timber. However, as the years passed and they became more established in their homeland, the Gages found time to build a comfortable storey-and-a-half frame house (one of the first in Saltfleet township) with two fireplaces.

In 1796, James married Mary Davis and they stayed on the Gage homestead to raise a family.

Slowly, the new settlers transformed the wilderness of the Niagara Peninsula into prosperous farmland. Then, in 1812, all that they had accomplished was threatened by the American declaration of war on Britain.

The War of 1812 - 14 and the Battle of Stoney Creek

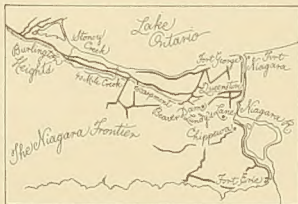
Demanding an end to British interference with U.S. ships in neutral waters, the Americans decided to retaliate by invading and annexing British North America to the United States. They anticipated an easy victory.

By the Spring of 1813, victory seemed within reach. The American forces had gained control of Lake Ontario and, on May 27, they soundly defeated the British troops under Brigadier-General John Vincent at Fort George.

The British situation looked grim. After this defeat, Vincent disbanded the militia, fearing he might have to abandon part of Upper Canada. He retreated to Burlington Heights to prepare for a last-ditch defence of the Peninsula.

Meanwhile, in pursuit of the retreating army, some 3,000 American soldiers advanced westward across the Niagara Peninsula, reaching Stoney Creek on June 5, 1813. They ranged their artillery on a knoll overlooking the road from Burlington Heights, and commandeering the house of James Gage for headquarters, they set up camp and prepared to rest for the night. . . .

Receiving reports of the American advance to Stoney Creek, Lieutenant-Colonel John Harvey scouted the American camp.



Finding it poorly organized and lightly-guarded, he urged a surprise night attack. General Vincent agreed it was their best chance of delaying the enemy advance.

In the early hours of June 6, 1813, 704 firelocks under the command of Colonel Harvey quietly approached the unsuspecting Americans. With a terrific shout they rushed the encampment. . . .

The Battle of Stoney Creek, although it lasted a little longer than half an hour, turned the tide of the invasion. The Americans dropped back to Fort George to reorganize. The surprise attack had set them on the defensive. Never again during the rest of the war did they penetrate so far into British territory.

The Gage house, riddled with musket shot, weathered the historic Battle of Stoney Creek to become "Battlefield House", a monument to the successful British defence of the Niagara Peninsula.

After the War

The eventual British victory in 1814 ensured that the Niagara Peninsula remained part of Upper Canada and years of prosperity followed the War.

The area around "the head-of-the-lake" and Burlington Bay became a bustling mercantile centre with the Gages playing a prominent part in its development. At the present site of the City of Burlington, James and his sons built wharves, a pier, warehouse and several mills, thus developing a thriving lumber and grain business.

James Gage continued to live on his original homestead, but his prosperity enabled him to enlarge and improve Battlefield House. He raised it to a full two stories and it became, in the 1830's, a spacious and modestly elegant home typical of the first enterprising and successful families who settled the Niagara Peninsula.

For some, the difficult days of forest labour were over, replaced by busy days of commerce and industry. Life became a little more comfortable, a little more refined — there was